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Title: "Always gotta be two mans": Lifers, Risk, Rehabilitation, and Narrative Labour

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Abstract

All prisoners have their identity stripped from them and, ultimately, reconstructed by the institutions in which they are incarcerated. However, for life and indeterminately sentenced prisoners the effects of this process, reinforced over extended periods, creates a particular set of burdens. For it is this population, above and beyond that of other prisoners, who need to address the implications of an imposed carceral identity in both navigating the day-to-day life of the prison and securing release. The four core burdens are firstly, an ambiguity on what identity indeterminately sentenced prisoners were supposed to have. Secondly, reconciling an imposed identity that they did not necessarily feel adhered to their pre-established sense of self. Thirdly, recognition that in order to operate or perform within the prison they needed to adopt an institutionally acceptable form of their self. Fourthly, that they had to manage how their performance of self was judged and recorded by the prison. This article aims to contribute to the growing body of work on Narrative Criminology by arguing that these burdens result in what I define as narrative labour.

Keywords

Identity, Lifers, Narrative, Prison, Risk, Rehabilitation

Introduction

Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

-Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

As a lifer who the fuck am I supposed to be?

-Smudge, 20, HMYOI Neverland

The prisoner is not allowed their own identity – what they have is imposed, shaped, constructed (Goffman, 1961). This is a particular problem for indeterminately sentenced prisoners who, due to extended periods of incarceration and the parole process, struggle with imposed identities that they do not necessarily recognise as their own (Jewkes, 2005). They are, in terms of identity and ontology, adrift. The processes of assault on a prisoner's identity begin first and foremost at the point of arrest where the relationship between the individual and the state is fundamentally altered (Warr, 2016a). From such an assaultive start, the prisoner then becomes subject to the varying formal and informal rituals of abasement, mortification and identity stripping that are designed to reshape the person into a manageable carceral subject (Clemmer, 1940; Goffman, 1961; Thomas, 1973). This induction is specifically destructive for indeterminately sentenced (hereon in IDS) prisoner's and their sense/performance of self as it is they, more than any other prisoner, that is trapped by this process (McCarthy, 2007).

The IDS prisoner is forced into a situation of having to both perform a self within the constraints of the institution, whilst at the same time manage the perception of that self as it is seen through the disciplinary lens of that institution. Both Carlen (2008) and Sim (2008) argue that in contemporary penal systems the coupling of this disciplinary lens with bureaucratic systems of control results in prisoners becoming imagined simulacra – representations of the prisoner based upon multiple symbolically laden disciplinary labels which transmute the prisoner from a person to a bureaucratic entity. As Smith (2010: 50) notes any 'normal human animal rejects being a *something* and drives mightily to be a *someone*', yet for IDS prisoners in England and Wales this drive is intentionally constrained in the interests of the institution, the wider criminal justice system, and even the body politic (Annison, 2018). Clifford (2010) argues that for IDS prisoners in England and Wales, this collision of an officially ascribed identity with personal perceptions of self evinces a dissonance as the prisoner tries to reconcile the denial of their former self, the imposition of a simulacrum, and the need to perform identity in the constraining environment of the prison. A point reinforced by Lempert (2016) when discussing the lived experiences of women lifers in the United States. This article aims to contribute to the growing body of work on Narrative Criminology (see Presser and Sandberg, 2015) by arguing that for the IDS prisoner this reality results in what I define as forms of narrative labour, the outward facing elements of identity work (Watson, 2008), which coalesces around the performance of a flagellant self.

This paper will argue that narrative labour is a particular burden for indeterminately sentenced prisoners (see Honeywell, 2015). For it is this population, above and beyond that of other prisoners, who need to address the implications of an imposed carceral identity in both navigating the day-to-day life of the prison and securing release via the parole process (Annison, 2018; Rose, 2012). The nature and forms of indeterminate sentences imposed by the courts in England and Wales have changed significantly and often since the advent of the Criminal Justice Act of 2003 (Roberts and Ashworth, 2016). Whilst the Mandatory Life Sentence (the only sentence available for a conviction of murder) remained largely unchanged, the 2003 Act introduced an Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (ISPP) which replaced the pre-existing Two-Strike life sentence (Criminal Justice Act, 2003). These sentences were designed to give the judiciary the means of sentencing those considered a danger to the public (those convicted of repeated violent and sexual offences, arson, as well as a wide range of nonlethal terrorist offences) to indeterminate periods of custody. The ISPP sentence was itself replaced by a new iteration of the Two-Strike life sentence in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act of 2012 (LASPO, 2012; Rose, 2012).

The Ministry of Justice statistics for 2018 (MoJ, 2018) indicate that 14% of the prison population of England and Wales (10,800) are serving one of the varying forms of indeterminate sentences that can pertain under this current criminal justice system. Of these, 67% (7275) are serving a mandatory life sentence and the rest either an Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection or either of the iterations of the Two-Strike life sentence. What makes these sentences unique is that they have no determinate ending the sentence is fundamentally 99 years in length with a recommended minimum period of incarceration being set by the sentencing judge and the Lord Chief Justice (Annison, 2018). Prisoners are not released from these sentences until such a time that their minimum period of incarceration has expired and the Parole Board deem that their risk to the public has been so diminished that they are safe to release (Nichol, 2007). Once released into the community they are on a Life licence – a form of probation/community supervision which exists for the remainder of their life.

The research

This article arises from fieldwork conducted whilst working for a third sector organization in two distinct prisons between 2011 and 2014, and 10 focus groups conducted in one of those prisons. This latter prison was a Young Offender Institute, which holds 400 early stage, long term young men between the ages of 18 and 22 of which a disproportionate number (62%) were of BAME backgrounds, which I have named HMYOI Neverland. The second establishment was a mid-sized (600), Category C special function prison with a rapidly changing foreign national prisoner population which I here refer to as HMP Lazaretto House. My role in both of these prisons was to act as an independent Prison Council facilitator. As part of that role, it was my responsibility to observe and report on the prison by engaging both prisoners and staff in formal and informal dialogue in order to uncover their collective experiences of the prison. Informed consent was sought for all quotes, case studies or instances utilised in the production of any report and subsequent academic publication.

The focus groups were conducted in HMYOI Neverland who, at the time of the fieldwork, had nearly 40% of their population serving some form of indeterminate sentence. The

purpose of the focus groups was to gain an understanding of how life and indeterminately sentenced prisoners experienced dedicated provisions in HMYOI Neverland for those serving such sentences. However, each of the focus groups rapidly moved from discussions on what services were or were not available to in depth discussions about what it meant to be a 'lifer'. In total, 83 indeterminately sentenced young offenders were involved in the focus groups. In HMP Lazaretto House, the population who were serving formal¹ indeterminate sentences was far less. During the 30-month period of the fieldwork, I encountered and had extensive conversations with 27 IDS prisoners in this establishment. The majority of these prisoners were from either East Africa or the Caribbean, and 8 from Eastern Europe. These IDS prisoners were consulted, especially after having conducted the focus groups in HMYOI Neverland, on the topic of what it meant to be a 'lifer'. In total, I had contact with more than 110 indeterminately sentenced men across the two sites.

My own experiences as an indeterminately sentenced prisoner who spent more than a decade in over a dozen prisons also helped shape the nature and content of the focus groups and interactions as I was the only 'lifer' that any had met who had been through the system. In this regard, my 'insider' positionality (see Hodkinson, 2005; Teusner, 2016) was a boon. It is important to understand researcher positionality as this affects not only the relationship between researcher and participant but can also impact on method and results (Hopkins, 2007). During these projects, and especially with regard to the focus groups, I was inhabiting varying positionalities which can pose questions for both the findings discussed and the argument presented here (Soni-Sinha, 2008). I was, in essence, a facilitator, a former prisoner, an academic and a researcher. Ordinarily, it is essential that qualitative researchers ensure that their positionality does not negatively impact research (Kochan, 2013; Marshall and Rossman, 2006). However, in this sense my history and 'cultural competence' (Hodkinson, 2005: 138) provided a lens through which others could discuss their own realities and experiences. It allowed many to discuss their position in terms of my experiences, thus allowing them to discuss vulnerabilities and concerns in ways that, due to masculinity norms in the prison (Gooch, 2017), they would ordinarily avoid so as not to communicate weakness to others. It allowed for a set of themes to emerge which shaped conversation from which participants could agree or disagree. This mitigated many of the ethical problems that such variant positionalities can evince as my positionality was rendered somewhat passive by being utilised in such a fashion. As such, my positionality and researcher presence did impact and shape the responses from the participants but in a facilitative way. Also, due to the immersive and lengthy nature of the field work, any reflexive bias (Thapar-Bjokert and Henry, 2004) that my positionality may have conferred was consistently considered and revisited across multiple points over the course of the fieldwork, and across the different focus groups. The length and depth of immersion in the carceral and social habitus of the prison that the fieldwork allowed me also gave me the opportunity to revisit conversations and themes to establish their veracity and specificity.

¹ Many of those held in HMP Lazaretto House were subject to indefinite detention after their sentences had finished due to immigration and citizenship issues. The experiences of these individuals are not included in this article

Literature Review

Induction into closed institutions is defined by a systematic and ritualised process of deculturation where the individual's conception of self is subjected to an institutionalised assault (Goffman, 1961). The prison needs to divorce the individual from their prior sense of self so as to begin shaping that individual to its own interests. Through multiple '... abasements, degradations, humiliations and profanations' (p. 24), the prisoner's identity and conception of self is 'mortified' and stripped away. This 'stripping' is achieved through the varying reception rituals of cataloguing, strip searching, removing personal possessions, the confiscation of civilian clothing and replacing them with institutional ones, imposing an institutional numerical signifier, rule induction and other such processes (Clemmer, 1940; Goffman, 1961; Thomas, 1973). What is important is that the prison evinces an interdiction of the prisoner's former self which ultimately results in a civil, moral and a narrative abeyance (Mathiesen, 2006). Jewkes (2012: 46) argues that this 'entry shock' is the first event in a continuum of assaults designed to reinforce the institution's power and shift the prisoner from an autonomous self to a compliant entity. Wright et al. (2017) also argue that these processes of 'entry shock' can result in a more profound dissociative state than perhaps has been acknowledged previously in the literature, especially for IDS prisoners, making identity work both more necessary and more difficult.

These processes of mortification and the accompanying entry shock slowly abate for the vast majority of prisoners as they become acculturated to the new environment that they find themselves temporarily inhabiting. However, for IDS prisoners this process does not abate. As Hulley et al. (2016) note the temporal precarity of the indeterminate sentence, where release becomes an event in an unknowable future, means that the assaultive nature of prison on the IDS prisoner's identity becomes an inherent aspect of everyday life despite acculturation. This is a point made by Jewkes (2005) where she argues that serving a life or indeterminate sentence is to be consigned to an unbounded liminality in which the very markers of identity construction are denied and eroded. When this unbounded liminality, stretched out over an unknowable number of years (Crewe et al., 2017; McCarthy, 2007), is coupled with the constant official and psychological review which IDS prisoners are subjected to (McQueirns, 2005) the assault on the sense of self becomes chronic and profound (Richardson, 2012). As Nichol's (2007) notes for IDS prisoners much of this constant official and psychological review is predicated upon, and concerned with, the notion of risk and its mitigant, rehabilitation.

Risk and Rehabilitation

Contemporary prisons are constructed from matrices of disciplinary laden discourses which enmesh both those who govern and inhabit them (Sim, 2009). Each of these discourses both impose a particular ideation of what the prisoner should be and holds them in judgement against that ideal (Toyoki and Brown, 2014). Non-observance and/or non-achievement of these disciplinary ideals necessarily results in censure or punishment (Foucault, 1979). The prisoner must take these ideations into account in their performance of everyday self (Corey, 1996) and this adds further constraints, and complexities, to those performances. Risk, and its cognizant practices (measurement and management), have come to permeate, if not dominate, every facet of contemporary penal systems (Clear and Cadora, 2001). Resulting from a

growing reliance on, and diffusion of, scientific rationality (Beck, 1992) this modern idea of risk is inherently bound to the desire of hegemonies to control both their present and future environments (Luhmann, 1993; Giddens, 1998). Though 'risk' can be a neutral term (Renn, 1992), within systems of penalty, this term neutrality has been supplanted and the 'risks' posed by prisoners are cast solely as negatives and dangers that need to be measured, predicted, prevented, or controlled (Lupton, 1999; McKendry, 2006). As 'rehabilitation' is the means by which this is thought to be achieved (Brown, 2000) the notions of risk and rehabilitation dominate and inform the lifeworld, or habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), that IDS prisoners inhabit and in which they must attempt to reconcile a sense of self.

Risk and rehabilitation, as concepts, have such potency in the contemporary penal setting as these two intertwined discourses wield a great deal of disciplinary capital. The concept of disciplinary capital is derived from my doctoral research on the nature and role of forensic psychology in prisons in England and Wales (Warr, 2019). Fundamentally, the more a structure of power and its related discourses serve, promote or solidify the interests of the prison the greater the disciplinary capital is attached to the products or manifestations of those structures. I am here defining disciplinary capital as an adapted form of Bourdieu's (1986) notion of symbolic capital – any non-corporeal article that has an exchange value and which communicates some quanta of authority. Therefore, in prison, disciplinary capital relates to information, data, and recommendations which communicate some symbolic connotation that achieves the disciplinary constraints the prison seeks to impose. The notions of both risk and rehabilitation, in their own ways, are symbolically and disciplinarily constraining and thus both serve and solidify the interests of the prison (Carlen, 2005) and thus have a great deal of disciplinary capital.

In the contemporary prison, public protection ideals have become a governing mantra utilised to mask the naked disciplinary interests of control (Carlen, 2008). As a consequence, particular offence types and prisoners become more heavily enmeshed with ideations of risk (Pratt, 2000). In the context of England and Wales, and indeed in many other western nation states (O'Malley, 2004), these are specifically those serving indeterminate and life sentences for violent, sexual or arson related offences, those convicted under terrorism legislation, those who are perceived as having gang involvement and, with increasing prevalence, those who are designated as alien others (Bosworth, 2014). It is these individuals who, not only have the tarnished identity of the prisoner attached to them, but also have the stigmata of 'dangerousness' (Pratt, 2000). However, 'dangerousness' is not the only risk laden notion attached to IDS prisoners. There are levels of risk ideas which are, in many ways, laminated to the identity of these prisoners (Mathiesen, 2006). Offending behaviour, drug use, poor coping, self-harm and attempted suicide, friendships and collaborations within the prison, wealth, educational attainment, behaviour, conformity, intelligence, language use, and other such factors (Brown, 2000) can all add layers to the risk laden veneer of IDS prisoners. This compounds the 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963) that even ordinary prisoners are encumbered with. However, risk identities are particularly complex for young IDS prisoners who may have been subject to multiple iterations of risk-imposed identities over their short life course (see Mitchell et al., 2001). Such tainted identities, which for IDS prisoners are captured and replicated on file over prolonged periods to produce a bureaucratic simulacra (Carlen, 2008), also necessitate further narrative work in order to manage the reception of the spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963). This can be particularly difficult for the IDS prisoner when

elements of that risk contamination is predicated on structural needs (Hannah-Moffat, 2005) that may lay both beyond their ability to mitigate and their ken. Of course, as Lupton (1999) notes the sole responsibility for mitigating or minimising risk lies firmly on the shoulders of those labelled as risky.

There is an assumption here that the IDS prisoner is forced to adopt and perform an inauthentic self (Schmid and Jones, 1991). However, this notion of the adopted inauthentic self is somewhat simplistic and predicated on an essentialist notion of identity. Under this logic, there is a version of the self that is essential to the identity a person has but the performance of the prison self is akin to an artificial facade – or a public mask (Crewe, 2007). A prison identity then becomes the outward presentation of the imago (the idealised self that one wants others to perceive (McAdams, 1985), and the self is the internal emotional core that is the 'real' person (Jewkes, 2012). However, the notion that there is an essential self, distinct from one's identity, is questionable. Goffman (1959) reveals that the adoption of successful 'fronts', which are dependent upon 'sincere' performances, impact directly on the nature of the performer themselves. At this point, the distinction between the frontstage and backstage self becomes blurred. A point made by both Eakin (1999) and Stryker (2007) who argue that identity and personality are much more fluid than traditionally conceptualised. They go on to argue that this fluidity becomes compounded in circumstances where an individual is under threat, constrained, or constantly challenged. Identity construction involves a complex conjunction of inputs (Smith, 2010). Inputs that can include intrinsic factors such as history, self-perception, ego as well as extrinsic factors such as expectation, interaction, culture, context, and extant social circumstance, what Fleetwood (2016) refers to as the Narrative Habitus. The constant interaction between these factors shape the timbre of identity resulting in the production of something more akin to a pliant narrative rather than a fixed, essential reality.

The Flagellant Self

A previous UK Justice Minister, Michael Gove, stated that rehabilitation in the prison should produce prisoners who are 'Productive. Hard-working. Respected. Responsible. Able to look after children and family. And a proud tax-payer! What more could any government or governor want of a prisoner?' (Gove, 2016). Here, we see, in the very ideas of what the prisoner must become, the problems that IDS prisoners must mount in order to clear their identity from the stains imposed. Herein also lies the problems that beset the very notions of rehabilitation and their roots as a disciplinary discourse. Foucault (1979) notes that the very idea of discipline is inherently corrective in nature. The purpose of the prison is to change the prisoner - through training/correction (i.e. discipline). This is the rehabilitative ideal, predicated on Judeo-Christian notions of reform (Cullen and Gilbert, 2013) – which insidiously introduces the positivistic notions that there is something 'wrong' with the IDS prisoner beyond an act they may have committed.

Rehabilitation is usually perceived as a desired good (see Mann et al., 2018). Something we want our prisons to achieve and prisoners to have access to. However, the notion, and practices, of rehabilitation can be far from benign (Carlen, 2017; Warr, 2016b). Both Mathiesen (2006) and Sim (2009) note that disciplinary practices such as rehabilitation do not replace the old punitivity of the carceral institution but instead supplement and reinforce it.

As such, the practices of rehabilitation only benefit the prisoner as a collateral outcome and, as Carlen (2005) notes, what benign effect such discourses and practices may have are largely neutralized in the pursuit of penal interests. Rehabilitation then becomes in practice a means to reformulate the IDS prisoner's identity into a more compliant institutional one.

The notion of rehabilitation is however based upon very specific narrative tropes; tropes that underpin the very fabric of story construction and symbolic communication (Booker, 2004). Maruna (2001) identifies the importance of what he calls the 'redemptive script' to the process of desistance – whereby the individual must perceive and practice themselves as a non-offending person in order to begin to affect change in their life-course. However, in the prison it is not sufficient that the IDS prisoner perceives themselves in this way – they must convince others that this change, this reformation or rebirth (Booker, 2004), has occurred or is occurring (McCarthy, 2007; Stevens, 2012). In essence, they must cast themselves as the penitent and perform a flagellant self for those who can make decisions about their carceral future. If they do not then they do not progress through the prison maze and do not secure release (Nichol, 2007).

This tropic analysis highlights the manner in which rehabilitative identity work is necessarily narrative in nature (Presser, 2009). However, there is a risk when the performance of a narrative becomes the primary formulation of the imago (McAdams, 1985). As Stevens (2012) notes with regard to prisoners in therapeutic institutions, this notion of the reformed self can become the primary formulation of a prisoner's narrative performance (see also Ward and Marshall, 2007). The danger for the IDS prisoner is that they not only perform the narrative but begin to perceive themselves in such a fragile and idealised way – their very self-image becomes infused with the rehabilitative discourse and tropes that govern their performance. Crewe (2009) noted a similar phenomenon when he found that some prisoners adopted a lexicon of criminogenic need when referring to themselves which gave clear evidence of them internalising the institutional discourse (see also Wright et al., 2017). This reifying of identity to the carceral both reinforces the institutional perspective and discourse whilst cementing the very stain that they are expected to rid themselves of. In essence, they can no longer perform a narrative without reference to the sins of the past and their extant processes of flagellation (see Honeywell, 2013; James, 2016; Weaver, 2008). You see this is in most prisons but more particularly in places such as HMP Grendon and other therapeutic communities (see Carlen, 2006; Smartt, 2001; Stevens, 2012) where prisoners, and especially IDS prisoners, overtly introduce themselves with reference to their offence, their risk identities, and their flagellant self. It is what is expected of them to show that they are being 'rehabilitated'. It is this flagellant expectation that defines the liminal reality of IDS prisoners; they must always be the offender that was and the desister that is.

Findings: Navigating the Simulacra

The literature above highlights how the IDS prisoner's sense of self is immolated and how the prison ensures the need for identity work by imposing a simulacral identity (Carlen, 2008) laden with disciplinary capital. Karim, from Manchester, serving an indeterminate sentence for multiple firearm offences in HMYOI Neverland, captured this when he noted that '*We're high risk, we're lifers now, that's who we are. That's what they've made us*'. He went on to note that '*You can't escape that; you just got to fucking deal with it*'. What this highlights is

the recognition that as IDS prisoners they must navigate such symbolically laden simulacra. Their transit through the penal system is reliant upon their performances being accepted by those who report upon them. A problem compounded by the sheer volume of time, variant circumstances, and audiences through which these performances must be maintained (Crewe et al., 2017).

For the IDS prisoner risk becomes multi-layered, as was evident with Nifty. Nifty, a 21-year-old Anglo-African man, was 4 years into a 20 year tariffed life sentence. He had been convicted under the common law principle of joint enterprise for a multi-person murder of another young black teenager. He noted that:

They think I'm a gang-member which aint true. Never been. None of us were. But cause we is black, and there was a few of us involved we must be ganged up, you feel me? You have to live with that. What worse is that there are bare mans here from the ends [home location] innit – about 15 on my unit. We talk, we have it. But bosses and OMU [offender management unit] think we all ganged up. No, we just went to school together and here in together in the prison we look out for each other but ... that's how they see us. Gang. Then they tell me that I am not addressing my offending behaviour because I'm still involved with the mans them. What the fuck?

This prisoner was constrained by how his offence was interpreted, how risk ideations were adhered to him, and how his relationships in the prison were perceived as continuations of those risks. Though Nifty does not accept the veracity of these impositions, if he wishes to progress through the system he must act as if they are. Another prisoner, Tags, who was a year younger but in a similar situation for a similar offence, noted this when he said that '*On the [offending behaviour] course I gots to do the gang ting [pretend to be in a gang] innit. If not thens say I is lying and not taking responsibility. So I blag it, innit!*'. This particular problem for both Nifty and Tags pertained for all of those in their immediate social and co-defendant group. For Nifty, 12 of the 15 schoolmates that he mentioned were all serving indeterminate sentences and thus were all judged to be 'ganged up' in the same way. The risk signifiers imposed upon them were so laden in disciplinary capital that they became almost impossible to challenge. However, playing along in order to progress through their sentence cemented those risk signifiers and magnified the lens through which their behaviour and relationships were judged.

Shakey, a young white IDS prisoner, convicted for multiple arson offences, and who had a profound history of self-harm, noted a different laminating of risk that was no less impossible to escape. For him, every time he self-harmed (which was associated with his feelings of guilt and self-loathing over what he had done), the staff would write him up as being high risk as they saw his behaviour towards himself as being both a risk in and of itself and also related to his index offences. A perception that had arisen after a forensic psychologist had posited such a link in a written report, which was then repeated by various other 'reporters' (see Tanner et al., 2016). Here, he was trapped in vicious circle of perception. He noted that he was in a '*loop I can't get out of, everything I do adds to my risk level*'. This was a situation that was the reality of most. With each write up, the risk tinted lens through which the institutional simulacra of Shakey was perceived, like Nifty and Tags, became more entrenched and resulted in a need for further navigation.

Narrative Labour

One of the most common complaints that came from the focus groups was, as indicated by the quote from Smudge at the start of this article, that the young men did not know who they were supposed to be. They struggled to formulate a sense of what it was that the prison wanted them to be, and thus who they should be. As Dreads, a 19-year-old of mixed ethnicity from South London, serving an IPP sentence for multiple aggravated robberies, noted:

Bosses them don't want us to be road man [their outside self], but they don't want us to be wing man [prisoner] either, you get me? Them want us to be something ... boy, I don't even know what. I can't be that man though, you get me?

In response to Dreads another prisoner, Scouse, said '*but yeah, yous gotta change whose yours is don't ya? Not fucking going nowheres otherwise*'. This resulted in a consensus: you couldn't be who you had been and thus had to be someone else, but none were quite sure who that someone should be other than it must conform to what the prison and Offender Managers require. Here, there was an implicit understanding of the disciplinary capital that certain formulations of identity had for the prison, though not necessarily for prisoners. In every focus group these same sentiments were expressed. Another lifer, Tully, captured this when he noted that prison '*makes you work at being someone else*'. This reality presented a number of problems for young men whose identities were barely established prior to their becoming incarcerated (Corey, 1996). The first is that, for many there existed an ambiguity on what identity they were supposed to have. Secondly, there was reconciling the imposed identity that they did not necessarily feel adhered to their pre-established sense of self. Thirdly, the recognition that in order to operate or perform within the heavily symbolic realm of labels they needed to adopt into their identity the narrative they had to perform – in dramaturgical terms, they needed to become method actors in their own performance (Stryker, 2007).

These three issues resulted in a great deal of not just narrative labour but also emotion work. As Schitz, a very vulnerable 18-year-old Scottish lad who had killed his abusive stepfather, noted: '*Tis frustrating, I know I need to be someone else but ... I try, try, bang ma fucking head, and it just nae work*'. These frustrations were especially acute when the prisoner recognised that who they were desired to be, the repentant or the flagellant, did them a disservice in the toxically masculine, brutal, and often extremely violent society of HMYOI Neverland. A clear example of this was when Bigga, who at 21 was 7 years into a life sentence, noted that:

Mans here will merc [attack] you if you is weak, fam. That's the thing innit, mans try and merc you you gotta end them. That's how it is ... sometimes it's necessary, fam. How can I show I'm rehabilitated in here when that's how I gotta live? You know how much that fucks your head up fam? Always gotta be two mans, one in here and one for them.

McKendy (2006) argues that such divided performances leads to what he refers to as 'narrative debris'. Here, the clash between aspects of identity that may have disciplinary capital but not carceral capital, results in collateral remnants of identity that do not fit to any adoptable identity or displayed narrative. This narrative debris disrupts emergent senses of self and further adds to the ontological uncertainty that the prisoner experiences. The more this conflict exists the greater the danger of coalescing narrative bumps derailing the narrative

work being undertaken and resulting in profound cognitive dissonance. As Richie, a lifer from South East London, who, prior to imprisonment, had a historical/familial criminal identity, noted:

In here all sorts of things fuck you up, you know what I mean? Normally you give your nut [head] a wobble and you crack on. This shit though? Be this, be that, be this, be that ... that's what fucks you right up. Wobble your nut all you want ... I just feel my nut is falling off! Know what I mean?

It became evident that in trying to resolve this dissonance some went beyond the utilisation of disciplinary signifiers in shaping their performance to genuinely attempting to recast themselves in terms of the rehabilitative imago. One IDS prisoner even went on to note that 'everyday I look at myself in the mirror and think I have to change that person'. Here, we see the process of the self being performed becoming so entangled with the flagellant expectation that the prisoner's identity becomes narrowed, or reified, to this aspect. It was not uncommon for prisoners I had contact with to speak of themselves in terms of their offence first and foremost. Joe-Boy even introduced himself at the focus group by saying that:

I'm Joe-Boy, killed me cousin after a fight yeah, at a family thing. Not a day goes by without me regretting it, yeah. Always gonna feel bad about it. But I done it.

For some of these IDS prisoners however, especially those who had spent slightly more time inside or who were a little older, the differences between the institutionally desired identity and their sense of self had been eroded. They had learnt not only who they must become in order to be one of the group but also one with the institution. For some this revolved around being Listeners, peer workers or gym orderlies.² For others, it was related to the adoption of a religious identity that allowed them to take on quite formal redemptive narratives. One such prisoner, Ackee, an Anglo-Jamaican serving a life sentence for an undisclosed offence, noted that his conversion to Islam in the prison had allowed him to 'be at peace with I, and to forgive I, and to be the I who can get out' (for a fuller discussion of the role of religion, see Crewe et al., 2017). For these individuals, it was the internalisation or adoption of the narrative, which whilst fraught and ever challenged, nevertheless had a contiguity and a durability that made their sense of personhood possible (Smith, 2010).

Of course, this poses something of a problem for narrative criminology: how do we disentangle this Gordian knot of narrative/identity/self? As Eakin (1999) notes the relationship between identity (the inherent self), narrative (the performed self), and what he refers to as the conceptual self (the abstracted notion of self) can be so complex as to be inseparable. In this regard there may not be a distinction, they may be mutually constructed and mutually constructing. If this is true then narrative performances like Joe-Boys must, to some degree, be taken at face value. However, as Eakin further argues, just because this may be true this does not mean that narrative performance does not have either functionality or utility. The stained nature of the 'offender' status means that IDS prisoners need to convince the authorities of the prison that they are indeed a changed person. A young Welsh lifer named Stewie explained this 'staining' when he noted that: 'We're all, not right, innit? We've all done things that normal people don't.' He went on to note that it was important that 'We

² Listeners are prisoners trained by the Samaritans to offer peer support to other prisoners in distress or at risk of self-harm and suicide. There are other peer-workers who work in a number of roles to help other prisoners.

show them how we aint like that anymore, show them we've changed'. Such need meant that many IDS prisoners were engaged in quite complex processes of evincing narrative acceptance in others. It is this process which I define as narrative labour.

Stewie captured the essence of this labour when he spoke of '*overcoming his former self*' and making sure that the prison officers saw the '*new*' him. Joe-Boy reinforced this notion when he noted that '*... you have to make a positive change, yeah? Be a good person, do good t'ings, be seen to be doing the good t'ings, yeah?*'. Yellow, a highly intelligent young Lifer originally from West Africa, noted that '*It doesn't matter whether any change is real, what matters is if it is seen, and crucially, written down. For it to be real here [in the prison] it has to be in a report*'. Others across all 10 focus groups echoed this same sentiment – it was important that you been seen to be making a change and that perception be recorded. The most commonly noted opportunities for performances of change related to the Listener scheme, adoptions of faith, undertaking charity fundraising, and education as not only were these most visible but they also carried recognisable disciplinary cachet. Each provided evidence for, and added disciplinary capital to, narrative work.

Such narrative labour was not easy. Acceptance of a prisoner's narrative performance is dependent upon successful utilisation of the accepted group linguistic forms (Coulthard, 2008) which underpin the carceral habitus. However, a number of prisoners stated during the focus groups that though they didn't necessarily understand the reasons why they were expected to behave in certain ways, or represent themselves in a given manner, they did so as a matter of routine as they knew this is what was expected of them. One of them, 20-year-old Spider from Manchester, noted that:

Spider: *When I first came here one of the mans told me to never admit to getting angry. So I don't. I always tell them I do the count to 10 thing and walk away ..*

Me: *Why do you say that?*

Spider: *I don't know. Works though.*

This is complicated further where only specific linguistic signifiers carry sufficient disciplinary capital to be acceptable. These linguistic constructs are based in specialised and expert discourses that are often alien to those subject to them. An example of this was Lucky, a young lifer from Manchester who had accidentally killed his best friend, when he explained that managing his risk was difficult because he had BDP (he meant Borderline Personality Disorder but consistently got the acronym wrong). He said that whenever officers were around he would be well behaved and '*do what he was told without arguing*' so that he could show them that his '*BDP was being managed*'. In that group, Scouse asked him if he knew what BPD meant and he responded '*Nah ... its just what the psychologist said I got*'. Like Lucky, other IDS prisoners would couch their narrative performances in the criminogenic signifiers utilised in the prison but many had little understanding of the concepts which underpinned the terms they used. In a separate piece of research with forensic psychologists employed in the prison one long standing psychologist noted that often prisoners would '*... do themselves a disservice by using psychological concepts but getting them wrong*'.³ There

³ This quote is taken from my Doctoral research entitled: *The Forensic Psychologist: The Contemporary Prison Psychologist in Person and Practice* (Warr 2019)

did seem to be a systemic ignorance amongst the young men in HMYOI Neverland with regard to the discourses to which they were subject. In all but one of the focus groups I was asked to explain what 'risk' was and how it was measured, what the 'cognitive' in cognitive behavioural therapy meant, what was a sentence plan for, and, perhaps most disturbingly, what did 'indeterminate' mean? For many of these young men the very linguistic forms that they needed to adopt in order to successfully navigate the prison were simply beyond their reach and this compounded the problems they faced in their narrative work.

Narrative labour was a particular problem for these prisoners. Due to the bureaucratic power of the prison (Crewe, 2009) many prisoners found that their narrative labour was focused on attempting to manage how this intangible force recorded them. Both Stewie and Nifty complained that the prison authorities '*wrote everything down*' and would '*put notes on your file*'. Whilst Bigga noted that he had been shocked to discover that his psychology file was about 6 cm thick with '*reports and, and reviews, and ... well everything, fam*'. There was an explicit acknowledgement across all the focus groups that '*as a lifer*' you needed to '*be careful what [they] wrote down about you*'. When asked why very few could provide an answer. There was often a collective shrug. Though they accepted the necessity of attempting to control how they were portrayed in their file, often these young prisoners did not quite know why this wariness was necessary. It lay so far beyond their experience they could not perceive the reason for it.

Unlike other, more experienced, lifers further on in the system (see Crewe et al., 2017), these young men were unaware of the bureaucratic black hole that they could fall into if they failed to influence this recording process in a positive way. Given the dominance of scriptural formats in the long-term management of indeterminately sentenced prisoners the representation that exists on file can have devastating consequences for the carceral career of these prisoners. An example of this emerged after the focus groups when Nifty, who was being moved into the adult estate and had expected to be moved into a lower security prison in order to continue to progress through the system, was informed that he was instead being moved into the High Security estate due to his on-going gang affiliations. The counter-narratives imposed by institutional mechanisms (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) are the effective lens by which these young prisoners will be viewed. For those, like Nifty, whose narrative performance misaligns with these representations, evincing a negative judgement, their future lives are uncertain. If a narrative performance becomes unsuccessful it runs the risk of becoming progressively damaging. In effect, the narrative labour that the prisoner engages in can become counterproductive, especially if they are perceived as trying to 'game' the system. Smudge, summing up the discussion in one of the focus groups, explained:

Sometimes, don't matter what you say, or who you are they hold it against you. It's all on file. You can't challenge that shit. All of us here our risk level ain't changed, in fact it gets worse. Me and [name of prisoner] we got higher risk scores than when we come and we ain't done shit. We both do the course and that but ... they think we lying just to get shit, innit?

Conclusions

This article has explored the nature of the identity and narrative work that indeterminately sentenced young prisoners in HMYOI Neverland are forced to undertake. This important is important for at least three reasons: firstly, the recognition that a change of narrative

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performance is necessary but the terms (or script) of that change are ambiguous creates a great deal of dissonance for these young men. They are told they need to change but this is often from an unrecognised 'them' to an unknowable 'them'. Secondly, navigating the simulacra imposed by the prison requires complex identity work that may not be achievable for all. If immature or incapable performers fail to adopt those accepted linguistic tropes that have sufficient disciplinary capital, then impossible barriers are being put in their way by the very disciplinary discourses which are supposed to aid their 'rehabilitation' and release. Finally, there are potential repercussions for those prisoners who adopt a flagellant identity and successfully navigate the prison and secure release. Outside of the carceral habitus identities with disciplinary capital have little cachet where a differing cultural capital is needed. Yet, if all the prisoner has left in terms of sophisticated narrative performance is an entrenched carceral identity then, just as Smudge noted at the start here, in the outside world, who the fuck are they to be?

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